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ABSTRACT

Although learning the value of being nonviolent at home is very important, school and community programs are also valuable, because participants can work together to prevent violence in their neighborhoods and can help each other avoid violence. Education programs can include conflict resolution and mediation training as school courses. Crime prevention and law-related education help young people reduce their chances of becoming victims of crime or perpetrators themselves. Programs to teach youth about the dangers of guns and gun safety are new, and little research has demonstrated their effectiveness, but it is probable that such programs are useful. Life skills training also can help young people learn how to avoid conflict. Recreation programs by themselves are not enough to prevent youth violence, but they can help control tensions in the community and be a valuable addition to education programs. Even though many violence prevention strategies are effective alone, their value is greater when they are combined. Multi-intervention programs add to education and recreation programs in addressing youth violence. (SLD)

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for parents/about parents

A GUIDE TO COMMUNITY PROGRAMS TO PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE

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There are many different ways to teach young people to avoid violence altogether, or to keep conflicts from becoming violent. Learning at home about the value of remaining nonviolent is very important, of course. But school and community programs are also valuable, because the participants can work together to prevent violence in their neighborhoods and can help each other avoid violence.

Violence prevention programs are becoming very popular, and there many different types. Most programs can be changed to satisfy the specific needs of participants and the communities they live in. A school and community might have only one program or they might have several different programs. The major types of programs are described below.

Education Programs

Conflict Resolution and Mediation Training

Conflict resolution programs help youth to develop sympathy for others and to control their emotions. They also teach skills in communication and problem-solving. Usually, participants engage in role-playing so they can feel what "the other side" feels.

Mediation training programs for students (and sometimes teachers and other adults) teach ways to settle all the kinds of conflicts between individuals that occur in the school or in the community. Program graduates are regularly called on to settle disputes in a way that allows both sides to win something. Usu-

ally, mediators work in pairs to solve problems. Mediation is valuable for both the disputants and the mediators: the disputants get assistance in resolving their conflicts fairly and without violence, and the student mediators feel empowered to help one another deal with their differences without adult involvement.

These programs are usually offered as school courses. Children of all ages can benefit from them because they can easily be changed to include the conflict-related problems faced at different ages.

Crime Prevention and Law-Related Education

Because teenagers are victims of crime more often than any other age group, this program presents information on what crime is, on issues of concern to crime victims, and on the juvenile justice system. It helps participants keep track of local crime, ask community members what they think are the most serious safety problems, and identify other programs to prevent crime and help victims. Another activity can be to evaluate local substance abuse programs for young people. The crime prevention program may also cover conflict resolution and mediation.

The goals of this program are to reduce young people's chances of becoming crime victims, to encourage them to create school and community projects to reduce crime, and, in general, to feel more responsible about making their community safer.

Gun Violence Education

Programs to teach youth about the dangers of guns or about how to use guns safely have been developed only recently, but some organizations have begun to adapt older programs to do this. Programs specifically devoted to handguns are even more limited, although the easy availability of handguns, particularly in urban areas, suggests they are needed, and a few organizations are now developing these as well.

School courses on guns are very controversial, but, in general, they include: information about types of firearms, gun safety, counseling, and crisis intervention. Organizations that have created courses range from the National Rifle Association, which emphasizes safe shooting in a program for elementary school students, to the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, which warns youth about the dangers of handguns and tries to keep them from using guns.

Because of the newness of these programs, their effectiveness has not yet been shown, but it is likely that any effort to help young people understand how weapons work and the consequences of using guns would be valuable.

Life Skills Training

While these programs may not address violence directly, they can help young people learn how to avoid violence. The programs usually cover ways to end conflicts nonviolently, to form friendships, to resist peer pressure, to be assertive, and to have good relationships with adults.

Related programs develop self-esteem, particularly for minority youth, who may be led to violence by their belief that they are victimized by racism.

Recreation Programs

Recreation programs alone are not enough to prevent youth violence, but they can help control the tensions in a community, and they are a valuable addition to education programs. Sports are good outlets for stress and anger, and organized sports programs teach youth how to get along and work with each other, and help keep youth off the street and away from possible violence. In particular, sports centers that are open late into the night can help the most vulnerable youth, who don't have a home life to keep them away from temptations.

Some youth sports centers are beginning to include violence prevention education in their overall program. Others also monitor the behavior and school performance of participants in order to help them apply the values learned in sports to other areas of their lives.

Multi-Intervention Programs

While many violence prevention strategies are effective alone, their value is greater when they are combined. In addition to the education and recreation programs described above, communities are including other prevention activities in their efforts. These include: the use of metal detectors and other equipment to keep weapons out of the hands of youth; increased policing of schools and neighborhoods to prevent crime; programs to help youth who already were either victims or perpetrators of violence; and social and psychiatric services for at-risk youth.

This guide was written by Wendy Schwartz. Information in the guide was drawn from the October 1994 (volume 94, number 4, part 2) issue of ***Pediatrics****, the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics. It is a special issue devoted to the role of the pediatrician in violence prevention, based on a conference sponsored by the Johnson & Johnson Pediatric Institute.*

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Other guides to help parents help their children learn can be found on the National Parent Information Network (NPIN) on the Internet. You will find these guides in the Urban/Minority Families section of the Urban Education Web (UEweb), at http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu. You can reach other sections of the NPIN Web through UEweb or at http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html. The NPIN Gopher is at ericps.ed.uiuc.edu. Ask someone in your local library, your children's school, or your parent center how to see the information on this network.

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